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STATEMENT ON EAST TIMOR

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Let me begin this address by expressing my deep gratitude to the Committee for giving me this opportunity. I appreciate being able to lay my views before you as the first Canadian Member of Parliament to speak on behalf of East Timor.

It has been called the "hidden holocaust", the tragic events that have ravaged the population of East Timor. Accurate estimates show that as many as 200,000 people of the South Pacific island's population of nearly 700,000 have perished from acts of violence, starvation and disease since the 1975 invasion by troops of Indonesian General Suharto. Based on population, this would be comparable to eight million deaths in my country of Canada!

Mr. Chairman, although the plight of East Timor has received little international attention, the events of the bloody conlict and our options to redress it remain clear!

On December 7, 1975 as the tiny nation of East Timor was struggling towards independence after the disintegration of the Portuguese empire, it was invaded by its neighbour, Indonesia.

The invasion and its aftermath share a brutality that is rarely encountered in the history of modern warfare.

Further, Indonesia seems to be pursuing a policy aimed at destroying the Timorese as a distinct people and replacing them in their homeland with ethnic Javanese - the major Indonesian group.

Indonesia claims it invaded because East Timor was communist and to prevent possible "anarchy". But while there certainly was fighting on the border between the two countries, this was largely the result of Indonesian interference and destabilization. At the time of the invasion, East Timor was at peace under the government of Fretilin, the territory's populist Roman-Catholic nationalist movement for independence. Its leaders first focussed their appeals for support not on the Communist bloc, but on countries such as Australia and ~~of~~ the United States - in both cases, to no avail.

The story of East Timor has been kept out of the newspapers and out of the public eye, despite the universal condemnation of Indonesia by the United Nations and the international community, by sealing off the territory and only allowing supporters of the Indonesian regime to tour it!

Tours given to foreign dignitaries between 1975 and January of this year, when East Timor was declared "open" to outside scrutiny, were limited to government-controlled areas near major roads and kept under tight military control. Indonesia stressed the benefits it had brought - better roads, higher literacy, improved health care - all of them double-edged swords when basic human rights are sacrificed as a result.

Mr. Chairman and honourable delegates, paved roads, in particular, were built more in order to move the army around than to benefit a population! The Canada Asia Working Group, a church-sponsored human rights monitor considered to be fair and impartial, has concluded that that infrastructure is being built to facilitate the movement of troops and creation of new Indonesian settlements which displace existing Timorese villages.

Education and health care as well are part of an attempt to destroy traditional Timorese culture and replace it with the culture, religion and language of Indonesia. Together with an very aggressive birth control program, resettlement of the rural population near main roads for easier control, and the "strategic development" of East Timor, these policies blatantly discriminate against an entire people.

Fretilin, which has waged a guerilla war against the occupation army since 1975, is said by the Indonesian military to number only around 300 and to be on the verge of being wiped out. But Indonesian generals have been saying this for years and despite their efforts to the contrary, the guerillas continue to fight. Why else would 25,000 Indonesian soldiers be needed to contain them?

Mr. Chairman, Internal Indonesian army documents are more honest. Classified army manuals obtained by Amnesty International show that Fretilin has a large support network in most towns. Far from being a tiny group, it represents the majority of the Timorese. Monsignor Martino da Costa Lopes, the former apostolic administrator of the Roman Catholic diocese in East Timor, has said as much: "When people look for Fretilin, they should realize Fretilin is everywhere. Fretilin is the whole people."

International human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch, as well as a coalition of international church groups, have provided reports of the brutality inflicted on the Timorese by Indonesian forces: summary executions, beheadings, torture, imprisonment without trial and the use of civilians as human walls in front of Indonesian troops battling guerilla forces. Some civilians who have "disappeared" from their villages have been reported by several independent sources to have been dropped to their deaths from helicopters. There have even been reports of a photograph in an Indonesian newspaper showing Indonesian soldiers holding up the heads of their Timorese victims!

Mr. Chairman, the extent of the human suffering can be surmised from an official report in 1985 of East Timor Governor Mario Carrascalao, who said that 100,000 East Timorese had died since 1975 and the island had 20,000 orphans, 13,000 widows and 8,000 crippled or maimed!

Sadly though, Indonesia's holocaust remains hidden because international human rights organizations and other impartial observers are denied access to East Timor on the grounds that they are "biased" or "hostile" to Indonesia.

Since the January declaration that East Timor had been "opened", there seems to have been little change. A few reporters have been allowed into the territory, but the places and people they have been permitted to see by the military authorities remain tightly supervised and controlled. We must realistically ask ourselves then, what chance for peace and independence is there for East Timor?

The declaration that East Timor has been opened, in however limited a fashion, shows how vulnerable Indonesia is to international pressure. And it is particularly vulnerable to Western countries like Canada, which provide support in the form of humanitarian aide to the Indonesian regime. Without this support it is unlikely Indonesia would sustain its military occupation of East Timor.

Although I do not agree with this position, a spokesman for External Affairs in Ottawa told me that Canada considers East Timor's incorporation into Indonesia as its 27th province to be "irreversible in practice" and went on to add that a "friendly and conciliatory approach toward Indonesia is needed to encourage it to respond to the desires of the East Timorese". Finally, I was told that Canada voted in favour of removing East Timor from the General Assembly in 1982 and from the Human Rights

Commission in 1985 because Canada accepts East Timor's de facto Status as a province of Indonesia.

I felt it necessary to mention the history behind the invasion of East Timor as well as Canada's official position with regard to East Timor to clearly demonstrate the need and urgency to lobby the United Nations to call for self-determination for the Timorese people!

Indonesia's attack was in direct violation of the United Nations two most basic tenants: integrity of territory and the right to self-determination. As a concerned Canadian Parliamentarian for East Timor, I believe my government's role should be to press for a genuine opening of East Timor, a ceasefire in the 13-year-old siege of this tiny country by a neighbour many times its size, and a complete withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor.

Mr. Chairman and honourable delegates, I believe you will join me when I say that Canada is a nation with an impressive reputation as a strong advocate for human rights but it has come time to take the human rights records of countries into consideration before giving foreign aid and inadvertantly helping regimes repress other people.

Indonesia is a country with a dreadful human rights record. The Washington-based organization Asia Watch in a report issued in November 1988 stated that, "some of the worst excesses of the occupation forces have abated, but the Timorese people continue to suffer daily violations of fundamental rights, with restrictions on freedom of speech, association and travel amid a climate of fear."

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Rights and the Status of Disabled Persons, it is exactly this type of situation which I feel must be resolved through the application of international pressure.

Mr. Chairman, although I believe the stance of the Canadian government towards East Timor to be unfortunate, I am still very proud of our past record to protect human rights and hope that this can be applied to help the people of East Timor.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you once again for this opportunity and for your attention.